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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE NEW JERSEY[®] BOARD OF EDUCATION ON THE PROPOSED CHANGES ON THE NEW JERSEY ADMINISTRATIVE CODE 6:31 (BILINGUAL EDUCATION)

Good afternoon distinguished members of the State Board of Education. My name is Roberto Del Rios and I am the Executive Director of ASPIRA, Inc. of New Jersey. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify before you today.

ASPIRA is a statewide organization with operations in Newark, Paterson, Jersey City, Trenton and Camden. Annually, we service over 2,000 students who attend public school. Our mission is the education and leadership development of Puerto Rican and Latino youth so that they become empowered individuals who make significant contributions to society.

I testify before you today because the proposed changes to the Bilingual Education Code threaten the likelihood of Limited English Proficient students obtaining educational and leadership empowerment. Furthermore, the proposed changes also threaten the essence of a thorough and efficient education for these same very students.

I will only focus on two areas of the proposed changes. The first is the issue of parental consent prior to enrolling LEP students in a bilingual/ESL program. As a director of a community based organization I have serious concerns with this proposal. First of all, a notice is being sent home requesting that parents provide consent without an explanation as to **why** their son or daughter needs this service. Their consent is not based on any facts or analysis by proven methods of determining a limited english proficiency, but rather a piece of paper requesting a parents signature.

Another concern with the parental consent forms is that it will simply not work. How often have we sent parents consent forms for activities and programs which were never returned. What happens in the case of a student who truly needs bilingual

education services, but whose parent for some unforeseen reason does not sign the consent form. How long will this student last until he becomes completely frustrated that he is not learning and becoming disconnected from attaining the AMERICAN DREAM. This student will eventually become another dropout. Our society cannot afford another dropout.

The second proposed change I will address is the elimination of the language requiring districts to establish and convene a parent advisory committee on bilingual education. This section of the code (N.J.A.C. 6:31-1.11) is very contradictory. Subsection (a) provides for the maximum practical involvement of parents. Then subsection (b) and (c) which requires that districts establish and convene a parent advisory committee is being deleted. How can one expect that parental involvement will increase if districts are not being held accountable for establishing parent groups.

This proposed change is frightening and has the potential for serious ramifications for the survival of Bilingual Education. The elimination of a parent advisory council is only a convenient policy to limit the rights and influence parents have on the educational system.

Clearly, and beyond a shadow of a doubt, the elimination of the Parents Advisory Committee is a direct violation of a "thorough and efficient" education.

The changes that have been put forth by Commissioner Klagholz are nothing more but a wolf in sheep's clothing. It is obvious that the current administration is trying vehemently to cut as many programs as possible. Many of these programs are the stepping stones that allow our urban poor the opportunity to climb their way out of poverty.

I ask that you allow me the opportunity to paint a scenario where the United States of America no longer exists. Instead some foreign power is in control of government, industry, and education. The language of instruction in the schools is also foreign. Our children, who attend school, are instructed in this language. There is no English, Spanish, Creole, or Portuguese, only some other form of communication that as far as you and I are concerned could be martian. Are our children expected to learn their biology, algebra, history, chemistry, or trigonometry in a language that is completely foreign and not comprehensible? How long will our students be subjected to this environment that alienates their heritage and willingness to learn? How long will they remain in the educational system before they graduate? If they ever do graduate?

Bilingual education allows a student to learn in his native language. What is wrong with learning in your native tongue? Why is there a need to limit a students learning potential? I am sure that you all agree that one cannot argue in the name of education that it is better to know less than more.

In closing I urge you to strongly consider the issue of parental consent. Parents need to provide educated consent not vice versa. Also, the role of parents is critical in all aspects of education. By eliminating the parent advisory committee the presence and role of parents is endangered; who next to the children are the largest stakeholders.

Once again thank you for your attention.